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Cover illustration:
The Council chamber of the Town Hall (later Guildhall) in Landport, destroyed 1941.
Portsmouth R.O.

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BOROUGH GOVERNMENT IN PORTSMOUTH, 1835-1974

By Sarah E. Peacock, B.A.

On 1st April 1974, by virtue of the Local Government Act 1972, the most significant reform of the machinery of local government was instigated since the reign of William IV and the Municipal Corporations Act of 1835 which swept away the old oligarchical borough councils. Although Portsmouth today retains her city status by virtue of Letters Patent bearing date the 1st April 1974 she is now just one of thirteen administrative districts within the 'new' county of Hampshire. She no longer constitutes an independent county borough acting independently of the County Council. It is not inappropriate therefore at this point in time to consider the developments which have taken place in the government of Portsmouth since 1835.

Of course the Portsmouth of 1835 presented a very different picture from the Portsmouth of today with its population of over 200,000 and boundaries embracing the mainland areas of Cosham and Paulsgrove, not to mention the satellite town of Leigh Park within the administrative district of Havant Borough Council. In 1835 there was a population of between 50–60,000 and it was only in that year that the borough boundaries underwent the first of several extensions to take in the whole of the parishes of Portsmouth and Portsea. Until 1835 the borough comprehended the parish of Portsmouth and only part of the parish of Portsea which was known as the Liberty part of the parish of Portsea.

The Guide Book of 1835 describes Portsea Island thus:

'The Island of Portsea on which are the fortified towns of Portsmouth and Portsea, is nearly at the eastern extremity of the county of Hants. It is about 15 miles in circumference, and contains about 4,400 acres of most excellent land. Besides these towns, there are in the Island several villages, and very extensive hamlets near the towns, that extend from them upwards of two miles, in nearly one succession of buildings; and on the east of Portsmouth are several extensive ranges of superb buildings, which, from their contiguity to a large common, called Southsea Common, is named Southsea.

'The Island contains two Parishes, viz. that of Portsmouth, which with a small exception, is confined within the walls of that town: and that of Portsea, which includes, with the exception of a small part on the north, the whole of the remainder of the Island.

'The Port of Portsmouth extends from Emsworth, nine miles on the east of the town, to a place called Hill-head, five miles to the westward. Belonging to this port are about 300 vessels, registered about 10,000 tons, which are employed in the timber, coal, corn, Irish provisions, foreign fruit, fishing and coasting trades. From France are imported here vast quantities of poultry, hares, partridges and eggs: of the latter in one year no less than 29,309,752 were landed. It is termed a FREE PORT, where merchandise is allowed to be kept in Bonding stores, free of duty, until sold or exported.

'A large part of the Island is laid out in kitchen and fruit gardens, from which spring crops of vegetables are grown much earlier than in most other parts of the kingdom. The Island is celebrated for the finest kind of broccoli, single heads of which have been grown on it that weighed 25 lbs each. The soil and climate are also peculiarly adapted to the vine, especially at Southsea, where there is a fine vineyard, from which the owner's table is supplied with a wine nearly equal in flavour to that of the Portuguese Islands. At a suburb called New Town, Fratton, is also a fine vineyard belonging to Mr. Mearns, who has so much improved his vines that the grapes are equal in size and flavour to the finest foreign fruit; some of the bunches being upwards of 5 lbs in weight, 18 inches long, and 19 in girth. To this it may be added, that no market in London can produce finer meat than can be had in and near Portsmouth; and that bread is at all times 2d the 4 lbs loaf cheaper than at London or Brighton.'

The author concludes,

'the healthfulness of the place (if equalled) is not surpassed in any other such densely populated situation in the kingdom. For this, reasonable causes can be given, among which may be mentioned, that two large morasses have been drained, and are now fine meadowland. The suburbs have also underground drains; and the towns have common sewers, through which the foul accumulations are taken into the sea. To this is to be added, that the inhabitants have now a full supply of good water sent into their dwellings by two Water-works companies, which was not formerly the case. Good water being thus plentiful for use, the court-yards and streets are cleansed by its overflowing, and are free from noxious accumulations, which, being carried off into the sea, tends naturally to that increase of health which experience proves to have taken place.'

It is thus clear that by 1835 the development that was to become so rapid by the end of the 19th century was gathering pace. However, the inhabitants of Portsea Island still appear to have been preoccupied as they must have been for centuries past in coastal traffic and small-scale farming and market gardening.

The towns of Portsmouth and Portsea were far from being so healthful as the author of the Guide would have his readers believe. Epidemics of one form or another were always commonplace in the summer months and between 1848 and 1850 outbreaks of cholera and other epidemic diseases were to have a

devastating effect upon the population as evidenced in the cholera returns of Portsea Island Union, Michaelmas 1848–Michaelmas 1849, and the returns of the surgeons for the various districts contained in Robert Rawlinson's report to the General Board of Health in 1850. Of many of the courts in the Landport and Kingston district, the surgeon Mr. R. G. F. Smith said

> 'the houses . . . are . . . without proper means of ventilation, most inefficient drainage, and a lamentable deficiency of water; and if a privy is attached to the houses, the soil in many instances either passes under the floor of the sitting-room or overflows it.'

Even the outlying areas, 'the suburbs', were clearly far from satisfactory. Mr. Piercey, Surgeon of the Portsmouth Town District and of part of Southsea wrote,

> 'The whole of the houses in my Southsea district, especially as connected with the habitations of the poor, are badly built, the streets and courts are undrained, the water-supply is deficient, and the inhabitants are continually subject to epidemics.'

The governing charter of the Borough until 1835 was one granted on the 17th November 1627 in the third year of the reign of Charles I. The Corporation consisted of a Mayor, Recorder, twelve aldermen and an unlimited number of burgesses or freemen who nevertheless rarely amounted to more than about 110. There was little democratic about the Corporation's organisation. It was virtually self-perpetuating and had been in the control of one family, the Carters, for a number of generations. The Mayor was elected by the Mayor for the time being, the aldermen and burgesses, from two aldermen put in nomination. Once nominations were finalised the Corporation proceeded to an election. Each elector was given two balls, a black and a white one. They put into the balloting-box such ball as they thought fit, the other into a bag: a black ball by all voting for the senior of the aldermen, the white by all who voted for the junior alderman! The alderman with the greatest number of balls in the balloting-box was declared to be elected Mayor for the succeeding year.

By 1835 the Corporation was virtually moribund. Its activities were confined to little more than collecting the wharfage and harbour dues, market and fair tolls, and the fines and rents due from Corporation property. The Corporation had an exclusive criminal jurisdiction – the courts of jurisdiction co-extensive with the borough being the Court of Quarter Sessions, the Court Leet and the Court of Record. The Mayor, Recorder, ex-Mayor and the three aldermen elected magistrates formed the bench at the Court of Quarter Sessions although in fact the Recorder practically presided at the trials. The Court Leet was held twice a year, on the same day as the Easter and Michaelmas sessions, the Mayor presiding. Its principal duty was to supervise the weights and measures within the borough, to make presentments, and impose fines. The Court of Record was a civil court with jurisdiction over all personal actions. The judges of the Court were the Mayor, Recorder and aldermen; of whom the Mayor or Recorder had to be present.

In the Corporation's favour it must be stated that there was on the whole general satisfaction with the administration of justice within the borough. However, the Corporation had wholly failed to grapple with the enormous problems of an ever-increasing population confined within the walls of the old fortified towns and now spilling haphazardly across Portsea Island. A private resident, a Mr. Shepherd, gave evidence to Robert Rawlinson in 1850 which is a partial indictment of the old borough council's inability to control or regulate a steadily worsening problem:

> 'Very many of the evils, of bad roads, dirt and filth, arise from the circumstance that parties have bought land, fields and gardens for building purposes, and without any plan of making watercourses or drains, commenced building streets, rows of houses, and courts, throwing up the mould and clay dug out for foundations in front of such houses.'

The Commissioners on Municipal Corporations[1] stated that a rate had been raised in the borough for about fifteen years, the revenue being applied 'to the usual purposes of county rates'. The rate, they state, is 2d in the £, a single rate producing,

	£	s	d
From Portsmouth	159	14	4
From Portsea	325	5	4
Total	484	19	8

The expenses of the gaol were met from these funds, however, and what money was left could not have gone far to meet the pressing problems of inadequate drainage, paving, street lighting, cleansing and the like. Such was the general dissatisfaction existing that *ad hoc* bodies were established by private acts of Parliament in an attempt to grapple with the problems. As early as 1768 a private group of public-spirited individuals obtained an Act of Parliament 'for the

better paving and cleansing the Streets and other Public Passages in the Town of Portsmouth, in the County of Southampton, and for preventing Nuisances and Annoyances therein, and for widening and rendering the same more commodious'. Certain persons were appointed the first Commissioners for putting in execution the powers of the Act. The qualification for an inhabitant or resident was to be seised or possessed of a real or personal estate to the value of £600; in the case of a person not inhabiting or residing within the town of Portsmouth, to be in his own right, or that of his wife, in the actual possession and enjoyment of the rents and profits of lands or tenements of the value of £20, arising within the limits of the town of Portsmouth, and to be possessed of a personal estate to the value of £600. The Act, as the title expressed, was for the purpose of paving and cleansing, for the prevention of nuisances and obstructions, and for widening the streets. The Commissioners were empowered to levy a rate not exceeding 6d in the £ on tenants or occupiers of property for defraying the expenses of paving and keeping in repair the streets, etc., for sweeping and cleansing the same, and for all other incidental expenses. A subsequent Act of 1776 gave the Portsmouth Commissioners powers to light the streets and public places within the town, and – a new departure – power to establish a nightly watch. They were also empowered to levy a rate not exceeding 3d in the £ on tenants and occupiers, to defray expenses. Public-spirited inhabitants of Portsea obtained an Act of Parliament in 1764 'for the better paving of the streets and lanes, and for preventing Nuisances and other Annoyances in that part of the parish of Portsea, in the County of Southampton, commonly called Portsmouth Common'. A later Act of 1792 gave the Portsea Commissioners extended powers for the purchase of land for the purpose of 'opening and making more convenient communications, ways, and streets, and of widening, altering, and improving the same'. The Commissioners were also empowered to levy rates upon the occupiers of property according to the net annual value, but limiting the assessment to 2s in the £ in any one year.[2]

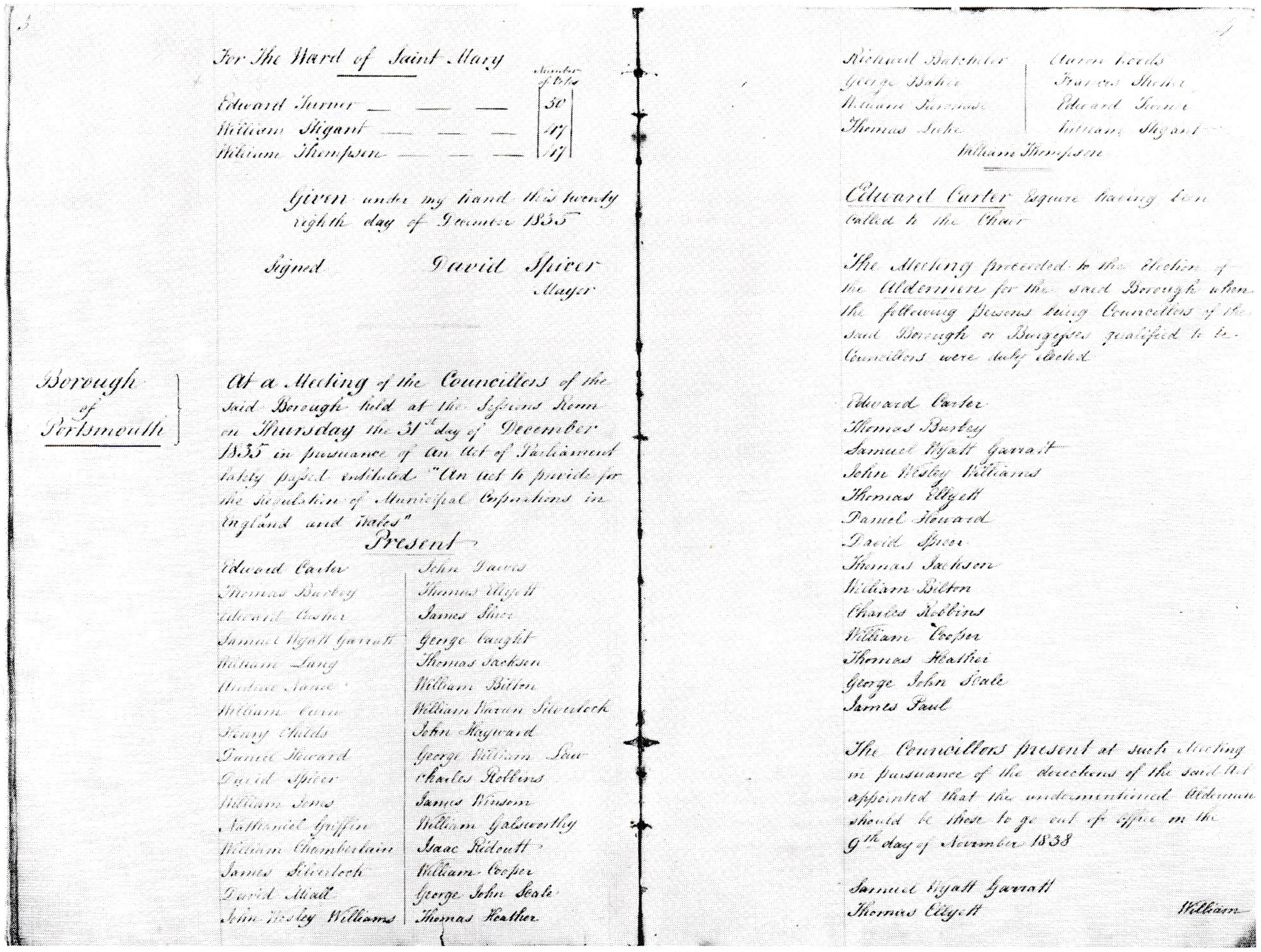
The situation obtaining therefore on Portsea Island prior to the passing of the Municipal Corporations Act of 1835 was that of a fast-growing population in the old cramped and foetid fortified towns: a population now spreading into the areas of Landport and Kingston and onto Southsea Common, bringing with it all the problems of inadequately controlled development. The administration of the borough was now divided between two bodies – the old and now almost helpless closed Corporation and the new *ad hoc* bodies – the Commissioners for Portsmouth and Portsea who realising that the Corporation was unlikely to attempt to grapple with the social problems of paving, lighting and street cleansing were determined to do something about these problems themselves.

However, the boroughs were to acquire a new lease of life in 1835. The Radical campaigns for the displacement of the unreformed borough corporations by popularly elected municipalities reached fulfilment in the Municipal Corporations Act of 1835. The old oligarchical boroughs were swept away and the government of the boroughs was now committed to councils elected by ratepayers. The new Councils were given authority to legislate by bye-law, and to appoint town clerks and treasurers. They were now to be subject to Treasury control with regard to loans and the sale of assets. They also acquired administrative powers over police, finance and property. Another new departure was the separation of jurisdiction from administration. Judicial appointments in boroughs were now under Crown control. As far as Portsmouth was concerned the municipal limits of the borough were now extended to its parliamentary boundaries to include the whole of Portsea parish. The borough was divided into six wards:

St. Thomas	All Saints
St. George	St. Paul
St. John	St. Mary

and placed under the government of a town council composed of a Mayor, 14 aldermen and 42 councillors. One third of the councillors were to retire each year and one half of the aldermen were to retire every three years. It is from this date that we can trace the beginnings of modern administrative government in Portsmouth.

The first municipal election took place on Saturday, 26th December 1835, Boxing Day, and the first meeting of the new Corporation was held at the Sessions Room[3] on the last day of the year, Thursday, 31st December 1835, when the principal business was the election of aldermen from amongst the councillors. In addition all the councillors subscribed to the Declaration enjoined by 9 Geo. IV cap. 17[4] and took the Oaths of Allegiance, Supremacy and Abjuration and signed and subscribed the Declaration of acceptance of Office of Councillor.



For The Ward of Saint Mary

	Number of Votes
Edward Turner — — —	50
William Stigant — — —	47
William Thompson — — —	47

Given under my hand this twenty eighth day of December 1835

Signed David Spicer
Mayor

Borough of Portsmouth

At a Meeting of the Councillors of the said Borough held at the Sessions Room on Thursday the 31st day of December 1835 in pursuance of an Act of Parliament lately passed entitled "An act to provide for the Regulation of Municipal Corporations in England and Wales"

Present

Edward Carter	John Davies
Thomas Barbey	Thomas Elliott
Edward Carter	James Spicer
Samuel Wyatt Garratt	George Caught
William Lang	Thomas Jackson
Andrew Nance	William Bilton
William Cooper	William Swan Silvertock
Henry Childs	John Hayward
Daniel Howard	George William Saw
David Spicer	Charles Robbins
William Jones	James Winsor
Nathaniel Griffin	William Galsworthy
William Chamberlain	Isaac Rideout
James Silvertock	William Cooper
David Mead	George John Seale
John Wesley Williams	Thomas Heather

Richard Batchelor — Owen Leeds
George Baker — Francis Shore
William Turnidge — Edward Turner
Thomas Lake — William Stigant
William Thompson

Edward Carter Esquire having been called to the Chair

The Meeting proceeded to the Election of the Aldermen for the said Borough when the following Persons being Councillors of the said Borough or Burgesses qualified to be Councillors were duly elected

Edward Carter
Thomas Barbey
Samuel Wyatt Garratt
John Wesley Williams
Thomas Elliott
Daniel Howard
David Spicer
Thomas Jackson
William Bilton
Charles Robbins
William Cooper
Thomas Heather
George John Seale
James Paul

The Councillors present at such Meeting in pursuance of the directions of the said Act appointed that the undermentioned Aldermen should be those to go out of office on the 9th day of November 1838

Samuel Wyatt Garratt
Thomas Elliott William

The first meeting of the members of the newly-returned Borough Council, 31st December 1835.
Minute Book 1835–9, Portsmouth R.O.

At least half of the new councillors had some experience of municipal affairs, having been elected burgesses of the old unreformed Corporation in the previous half-century. They formed a fair cross-section of the community, including six gentlemen, five surgeons, four merchants, three grocers, two druggists and two pawnbrokers as well as innkeepers, brewers, a banker, an attorney, a solicitor, an agent for Lloyd's, a wine merchant, coal and corn merchants, a painter, a butcher, a hatter, a staymaker, a tanner, a cord-wainer, a sailmaker and, more surprisingly, a yeoman.

Amongst the better known of the newly-returned councillors were the members of the 'old guard' – Edward Carter, David Spicer, Daniel Howard and Andrew Nance, to name but a handful of the more notable of the group. Edward Carter was the son of another Edward Carter, the third son of Alderman John Carter (1715–1794), the first of his family to enter civic life, and the nephew of Sir John Carter during whose mayoralty of 1797 the Spithead mutiny occurred. Edward was a lawyer by profession of Liberal views. He came to Portsmouth to supervise the mercantile affairs of his family. David Spicer, connected by marriage with the Carters, was a brewer. His business – Pike and Spicer – stood in St. George's Square, Portsea. He became a burgess in 1797, an alderman in 1824 and was mayor on three occasions, in 1825, 1829 and 1834. In his third year of office the Reform Bill was passed and he was to be the last mayor of the old Corporation.

Daniel Howard who died in 1850 at the age of 77 was described at his death as one of Portsmouth's most distinguished citizens. He was always an ardent advocate of civil and religious liberties. In his youth he and his companions fell under such suspicion for their views that tradition has it that they were forced to hold their meetings in a boat at Spithead. Howard entered the Corporation in 1812. He was elected mayor in 1818 and again in 1822, 1826, 1830, 1837 and 1841. Andrew Nance, who with Edward Carter was returned for St. Thomas' Ward in this first municipal election, was a posting-master in a considerable way, keeping both the 'Fountain Hotel' in the High Street as well as the 'Crown Inn' and the 'Blue Posts' in Broad Street.

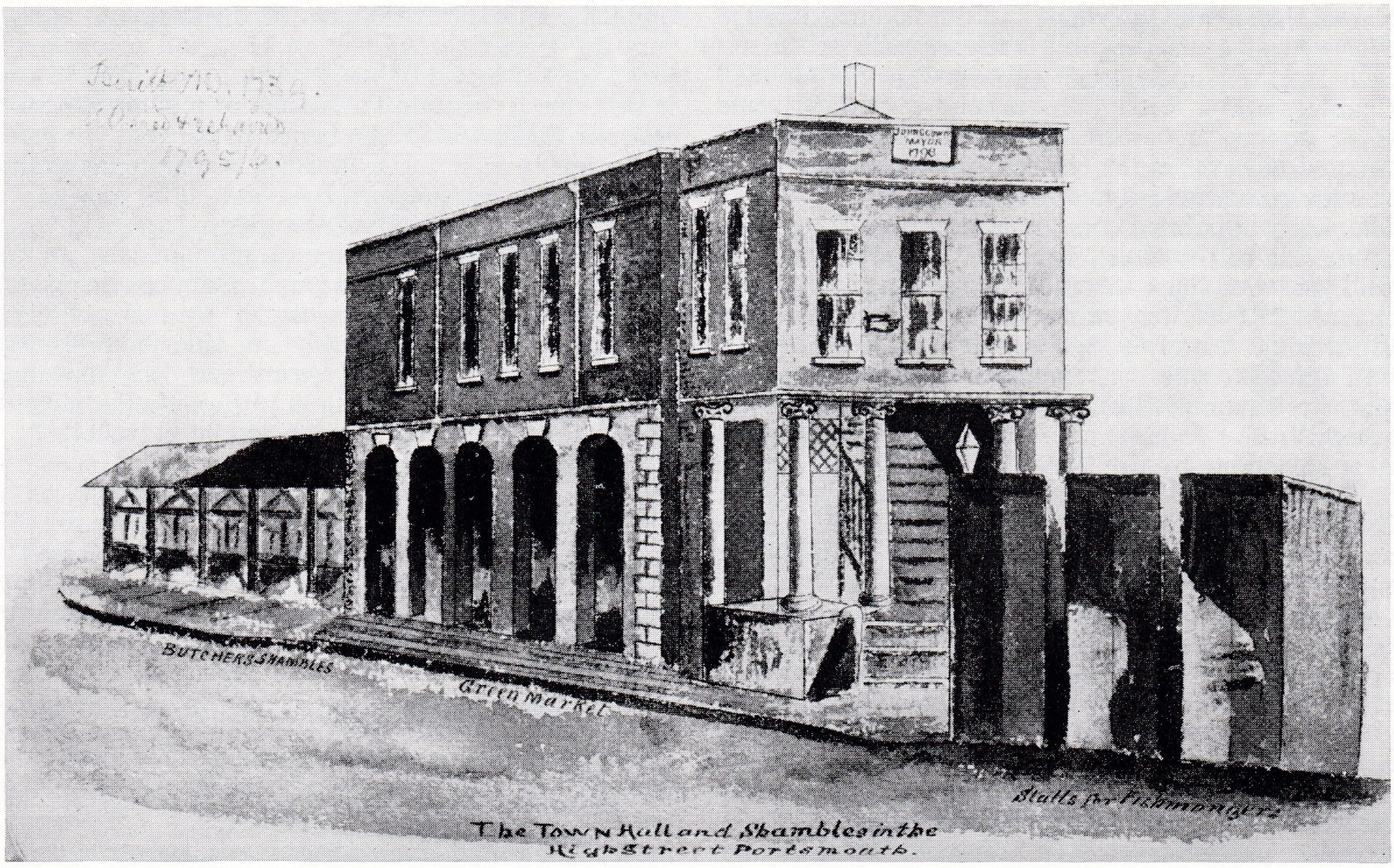
On the 1st January 1836 Edward Carter was nominated as mayor and unanimously elected on a show of hands, and Mr. John Howard was nominated and unanimously appointed Town Clerk of the

Borough. In the evening about 50 of the councillors and burgesses dined – at their own expense – at the Fountain Hotel, the Mayor in the chair, and at the dinner the mace was passed round 'in the old form' on the King's health being drunk from the Bodkin Cup. The *Hampshire Telegraph* paid a somewhat fulsome tribute to the old Corporation thus,

> 'It is fit that the country should fully understand that the old Corporation of this borough has been in the power or control of one family for nearly 50 years past; and that for immemorial time it has been a body of the closest sort; close, however, as it has been of late years it had manfully professed Whig principles of the most uncompromising character; it has preserved a reputation for integrity, honesty and incorruptibility; and the magistrates, though self-elected, have ever held the esteem and confidence of our dense population, of every class and character.'

The councillors turned to business at once. Amongst the resolutions passed at the meeting on the 1st January 1836 was one moved by Mr. Long and seconded by Mr. Chamberlain, that a Committee of the Council be appointed to report to a future meeting of the Council what measures should be taken to form an efficient police and watch 'for the due preservation of Order, Decency and propriety, and for the protection of Property within the Borough'. This was the first step towards the establishment of a regularly constituted police force on Portsea Island. The Committee moved swiftly and at the next meeting of the Council on 25th January 1836 they presented their report. A Watch Committee of 12 was subsequently appointed and drew up a report upon the proposed organization of a new constabulary force. The new force was to consist of 30 men: 6 head constables at £40 a year each, 12 ordinary constables at £10 a year each and 12 night constables at 14 shillings a week each. Three principal watch stations

The old Market House and Council Chamber which stood in the centre of the High Street 1739-1836.
Portsmouth R.O.



were to be appointed: one in the town of Portsmouth, one in the town of Portsea and one in Portsea outside the walls of the town. The report was accepted by the City Council and recruiting commenced, the new force being sworn in before the Mayor on 18th March 1836. Thus began the independent history of the Portsmouth City Police Force. The Force was, in fact, to preserve its independence until 31st March 1967 when the Hampshire and Isle of Wight Constabulary, the Southampton City Police and the Portsmouth City Police amalgamated to form one force, the Hampshire Constabulary.

The new Borough Council next considered the question of its own premises. At the meeting of the Council on the 8th February 1836 a motion was moved and carried unanimously that a committee (known subsequently as the Market House Committee) be appointed to consider the expediency of removing the Market House and Council Chamber from its site in the centre of the High Street and whether or not it would be desirable to provide a site for another, with all the expenses likely to be incurred. The Council Chamber had been rebuilt in 1796 following complaints that it was too small and the building in 1836 consisted of a market-place enclosed with arches on each side and on one end; above were the Council Chamber and a Record Room, and over these some small rooms and store places. The building was situated however in the centre of the High Street and as such constituted a nuisance and hazard to traffic. The newly-appointed committee selected a site on the south side of the street, near the 'Dolphin', and the land and buildings thereon were subsequently purchased. £1,000 was raised by public subscription towards the cost of the new building and the Corporation agreed to pay the remainder. Plans were invited and those submitted by Mr. Benjamin Bramble were accepted. The foundation stone was laid with great civic splendour by the Mayor, Mr. William Cooper, on 24th May 1837 and the building was opened on 28th June 1838, the day of Queen Victoria's coronation, amongst great jollifications. The entire cost was £4,000.

In February the new Council turned to the matter of trade and resolved that a standing committee be appointed 'for the encouragement and improvement of the Trade of the Port and its Fishery and for the purpose of recommending to the Council from time to time such measures as will tend to so desirable an object'. Subsequently the Town Council resolved to develop the Camber themselves and in July 1839 the Camber Improvement Bill promoted by the Corporation received the Royal Assent. In September the Corporation accepted a tender of £16,105 for the works decided upon and on 14th June 1843 the Inner Camber was opened. The total cost of the work was £21,822.

The question of Borough finance was considered at an early stage in the new Council's proceedings. At the meeting of the Council on 25th January it was resolved that a committee should be appointed 'to enquire into the state of the finances of the Corporation, and into the Sources of the same; also if any and what Improvements can be made therein'. It was subsequently resolved at the meeting of the Council on 23rd May that a Finance and General Purposes Committee be appointed 'to whom shall be referred all matters connected with the income and expenditure of the Borough more particularly as regards a proper levying and collection of the Rents, Tolls, Dues, Etc. . . .' The first Treasurer of the Borough was Mr. Erasmus Jackson, Chamberlain of the old closed Corporation.

The new Council continued to 'manfully profess' its Whig principles. In the early months of 1836 the Council petitioned Parliament, firstly in favour of the removal of civil disabilities on Jews and secondly in favour of the repeal of tax on newspapers, and it was to continue to petition Parliament at regular intervals between 1836 and 1857 on behalf of the Jews. In 1839 and again in 1841 the Council petitioned against the Corn Laws, resolving in 1841 that 'the deplorable and suffering condition of the great mass of people requires laws concerning importation of corn to be altered'. In 1847 the Borough Council displayed singularly humanitarian principles by forwarding a petition to Parliament early in the year against flogging in the Navy and Army and 1857 saw the indignant Borough Councillors petitioning Parliament against the high rate of income tax (9d in the £)!

The new councillors early expressed their concern over a problem which is still as relevant today as it was in 1836 – the lack of recreational facilities for the inhabitants of the densely populated towns of Portsmouth and Portsea. At their meeting on 23rd May 1836 the Councillors resolved to memorialise the Board of Ordnance

> 'That enclosed as the Towns of Portsmouth and Portsea are by Fortifications; with a numerous population outside the Lines it is of the highest importance to the health of the Inhabitants that they should be permitted under proper restriction to use the open spaces of land contiguous to the Fortifications and particularly the Glacis of the two Towns for the purposes of recreation and amusement'.

'It is considered that the Inhabitants of this Borough are . . . entitled to have the benefit of air and exercise on such parts of the public grounds as can conveniently be set out for the purpose and that such a measure would be highly beneficial to the Juvenile classes of the Community in particular . . .'

The resolution proceeded in even stronger vein,

> 'it is . . . incumbent on the Government where towns are surrounded by Fortifications, to render them in all respects as subservient as possible to the convenience and gratification of the public . . .'

However, despite the early initiative displayed by the new Borough Councillors in the fields of finance, trade and public safety several major fields still lay outside their cognisance.

The care of the poor and needy until 1836 when Portsmouth and Portsea reluctantly combined to form the Portsea Island Union was almost entirely in the hands of the officers of the two parishes of Portsmouth and Portsea. The Mayor and Corporation were only troubled with the poor where their duties as justices of the peace for the borough forced them to consider questions of settlement and bastardy. Until the late 18th century and the beginning of the 19th the parishes were considered a more than adequate unit for the relief of their poor. Those who were too young or too infirm to receive out-relief – in either cash or kind – and more particularly the vagabonds were usually dealt with in parish workhouses or poor-houses, where they existed. The Portsmouth workhouse was built by public subscription in 1725 at the northern end of Warblington Street; the Portsea workhouse stood in Landport, at the corner of Elm Lane (now Elm Road) and Commercial Road, and was probably built at much the same date.

The increasing number of paupers and the problem of rising costs led in 1832 to the appointment of a Royal Commission which reported in 1834, recommending far-reaching changes in the administration of the Poor Law. The result was the Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834. But it was certainly not at this stage nor until the early years of the 20th century that the legislators would contemplate vesting control of the poor and needy in the hands of local government officers. The Poor Law Amendment Act appointed three Commissioners to regulate the administration of poor relief throughout the country. Parishes were to be grouped together in unions – in the case of Portsmouth and Portsea in 1836 – and each union was to be controlled by another body, an elected board of guardians who were to be responsible for providing a workhouse.

The provision that was made for the education of the children of those unable to afford private tuition was purely a result of voluntary effort. Education was no concern of the newly-constituted borough council. It was not until 1870 when they adopted the Elementary Education Act that the Town Council finally became involved in the field of mass education despite the fact that in the early years of the century there was little enough provision in Portsmouth or elsewhere for the needs of a growing juvenile population. Such organizations as the Portsea Beneficial Society whose boys' school was established in 1755, the Portsmouth Society for Educating Poor Children, founded in 1803, and the few Ragged Schools inspired by the crippled cobbler, John Pounds, were a mere handful. The Portsmouth Grammar School, endowed by Alderman Smith in 1732, had a chequered history. The school did not actually open until 1750 and once established served the sons of the merchants and tradesmen of Portsmouth, quite ignoring the wishes of the founder who had stipulated that the school was to admit poor children of Portsmouth free of charge. It was not until 1821 that a Chancery decision compelled the school to accept such children.

There were a large number of dame schools in St. John's and Trinity Wards, Portsea, but these schools were often not so much teaching institutions as places where children could be left while their parents were at work. There was a serious attempt by a number of enlightened individuals, churchmen and Radicals, to grapple with the problem of educating the poor nationally – and of course locally – towards the end of the Napoleonic Wars following the foundation of the National Society, or to give the organization its proper title, the National Society for Promoting the Education of the Poor in the Principles of the Established Church in England and Wales, and its nonconformist rival, the British and Foreign School Society, both of whose activities were financed by a combination of private subscriptions at first and later government grants. However, only half-a-dozen schools appear to have been built in Portsmouth between 1814 and 1840. Four new National schools were built in the 1840s but they were not adequate for the newly developing districts of Landport, Kingston, Buckland and Southsea. By 1870 voluntary effort in Portsmouth was under a severe strain. Rate aid was the only solution to the problem in the end.

The Improvement Commissioners – the Commis-

sioners for Portsmouth and Portsea – continued to function independently of the new Borough Council, doing in a rather primitive fashion the sort of work which is now the province of a modern Borough Engineer's department. In fact in 1843 a further Act of Parliament was obtained 'for paving, lighting, cleansing, watering . . . and otherwise improving the town of Portsea'. The new Act repealed the two previous Acts of 1792 and 1826, the provisions, powers and authorities contained in them having been found defective and insufficient. The new Act now gave the Commissioners powers of acquisition of lands for purposes of street widening and making more convenient communications, etc., for prevention of nuisances, for lighting, for regulation of hackney coaches and porters and enabled the Commissioners to levy a paving rate of 8d in the £ and another rate, the improvement rate, not exceeding 16d in the £, for purposes of sweeping, cleansing, lighting, watering and generally improving the streets. A further Act of Parliament for paving, lighting, cleansing, etc., the town of Portsmouth was obtained in 1848, the powers and provisions contained in the two previous acts now repealed having been found defective and insufficient.

The Commissioners' success was not conspicuous however. Despite their professed aims, in July 1848 cholera broke out in Fountain Street, Portsea, and spread rapidly through the poorer districts of Landport. Fever and smallpox were also prevalent at the same time. The mortality that summer and in the following year was considerable. The Town Council was not able to cope with the situation and indignation amongst the town's population was considerable. In response to a petition from the ratepayers of the wards of All Saints, St. Mary and St. Paul, in which there was no local act for cleansing, paving and lighting, the General Board of Health sent Robert Rawlinson, their Superintending Inspector, to make inquiry and report upon the sanitary condition of the whole town. The Commissioners for Portsmouth and Portsea were amongst several organizations and individuals who gave evidence at the inquiry. Rawlinson despatched their statements in a few sentences however,

> 'There is a sufficient reply', he wrote, 'to . . . these statements, namely, that the paving is sufficient and good, the cleansing regular, "three times a week", that the lighting is all which can be desired, and the water-supply most unexceptionable. The returns of the medical officers state the direct contrary, and there is other evidence to show that the lighting is most imperfect, and the water-supply deficient, costly and bad in quality.'

Rawlinson found in his report that the borough was 'not as healthy as might be' on account of the ill-paved and uncleaned streets, imperfect privy accommodation, crowded courts and houses, with large exposed middens and cesspools; and no adequate power for effective local government. The excess of disease, he reported, was distinctly traceable to undrained and crowded districts, to deficient ventilation, to the absence of a full water-supply and of sewers and drains generally. He recommended that the condition of the inhabitants would be greatly improved by a perfect system of street, courtyard and house drainage, a constant and cheap supply of pure water under pressure laid on to every house and yard, the entire superseding of all local wells and pumps, the substitution of water-closets and soil pan privies for the more expensive and noxious privies and cesspools, and a regular and systematic removal of all refuse at short intervals. Courts and passages should be properly paved and there should be a regular system of washing and cleansing all courts, passages, slaughterhouses, etc. All these advantages could be secured under the Public Health Act and he strongly advised its early adoption.

The Report was a damning indictment of the Commissioners' activities. The Town Council acted immediately. In a memorial to the Ministry they referred to the expediency of investing the Council with sufficient power to implement the Public Health Act. The battle for power was now joined between the Council and the Commissioners. In the following year, 1852, the Council resolved that the Commons be petitioned 'that your honourable House do without delay pass an Act confirming the provisional order made for application of the Public Health Act to the . . . Borough . . .'

The Commissioners were determined to hold on to their authority though, and the opposition they engineered amongst certain classes of ratepayers– the wealthier sections of the population – was so powerful that the Council was forced to rescind its resolution and the measure was not proceeded with. In 1853 there was a further abortive move by the Town Council to secure the adoption of the Public Health Act. A public meeting called to discuss the matter on 4th January broke up in disorder without any decision being reached, and at a Council meeting on 8th February a proposal that the town should adopt the Act was lost, though by only two votes. On 21st February, after a lengthy sitting, the Council decided by a majority of one to adopt the Act – only to postpone the matter indefinitely after-

wards. The Commissioners' power seemed for the moment insurmountable and in fact in 1857 the Landport and Southsea Improvement Act was obtained. The Act created a new set of 36 Commissioners for dealing with those parts of the municipal borough not included in the Portsea Improvement Act of 1843, or Portsmouth Improvement Act of 1848. There were considerable powers annexed to the Act; no house thereafter was to be erected without a drainage system, roads and streets were to be paved and flagged and courts and passages flagged and drained. Land could be purchased for street widening, markets could be provided and slaughterhouses erected. The new Commissioners were authorised to raise money by rates not exceeding 1s 6d in the £ with a further rate in any one year not exceeding 6d in the £ for some special purpose. Subsequent events were to prove that obtaining an Act of Parliament was one thing, implementing the enactments efficiently quite another but for the moment the new Commissioners were all-powerful. In 1862 a system of drainage for the old town was first discussed by the Portsmouth Commissioners – although a majority declined to proceed. Despite their reluctance to make any concession of power to the Town Council the Portsmouth Commissioners were loath to undertake the reform of the borough's sanitary arrangements that was now such a vital necessity.

The population by 1861 numbered almost 75,000 and a crisis point was reached. On 14th April 1863 there was a great meeting of Southsea residents to protest against the inefficiency of the Board of Commissioners. There was some very plain speaking at the meeting and its effect upon the Town Council was marked. The work of the Commissioners was not being done satisfactorily and the mismanagement of the Landport and Southsea Board was now so blatantly obvious that on 31st May 1863 the Town Council decided by 46 votes to 8 to adopt the Local Government Act of 1858 which gave them power to abolish the Commissioners and take over their duties – as the Local Board of Health. The first Borough Engineer, Mr. Lewis Angell, was appointed in November at a salary of £500.

Thus the divided authority of Council and Commissioners was merged in one governing power within the borough and effective local government now became possible. The Council first met as the Local Board of Health under the Local Government Act of 1858 at the Town Hall in the High Street on 3rd August 1864. At a subsequent meeting on 15th August the Board agreed to appoint as clerk a member of the legal profession, and a treasurer who should be a person connected with one of the local banks, his duties being to keep the accounts. They further agreed to appoint a Drainage and Sewerage Committee of 12, a Roads and Works Committee of 18 whose duties should embrace the paving, lighting, cleansing, watering and entire management of the streets and roads, a finance committee of 12 and a Committee of General Purposes to consist of 12 members for the purpose of licensing and regulating hackney carriages 'and for the performance of such other duties as are not specifically within the province of any other committee'. Thus were laid the foundations of the modern City Engineer's Department and Public Works and Traffic Committee. On 22nd August Mr. William Orange Marshall, a solicitor of Portsea, was appointed clerk to the Local Board and Mr. Charles Francis, Manager of the Landport Branch of the National Provincial Bank of England, was appointed Treasurer.

The newly-appointed committees went to work enthusiastically and in September they reported back to the Board. The Roads and Works Committee submitted the following recommendations: that all repairs of pavements and crossings be performed by contract at a schedule of prices for one year; that all other repairs be performed under a jobbing contract; that the Board should provide its own carts and contract for the supply of suitable horses, harness and drivers; that the making and repair of roads be performed under the supervision of a surveyor and road foreman, the estimated number of labourers to be employed as a permanent staff being about 25; the appointment of a person to be called a road foreman at wages of 36/- per week who should be nominated and selected by the Surveyor; that the entire borough be lighted with gas every night throughout the year with an approved burner and that the same be done by contract at a fixed price to include lighting, extinguishing, cleaning, and repairs of lamps, columns, etc. These and other recommendations *re* tenders for the supply of granite siftings and similar goods were unanimously adopted.

More significantly in view of the effect its ultimate recommendations were to have upon the health of the population the Drainage and Sewerage Committee laid a report before the same meeting of the Board. They recommended that no time should be lost in adopting the schemes submitted by Mr. Angell for the effective draining of the borough. The Board therefore resolved 'that the Drainage and Sewerage Committee be authorised to take such steps as may be neces-

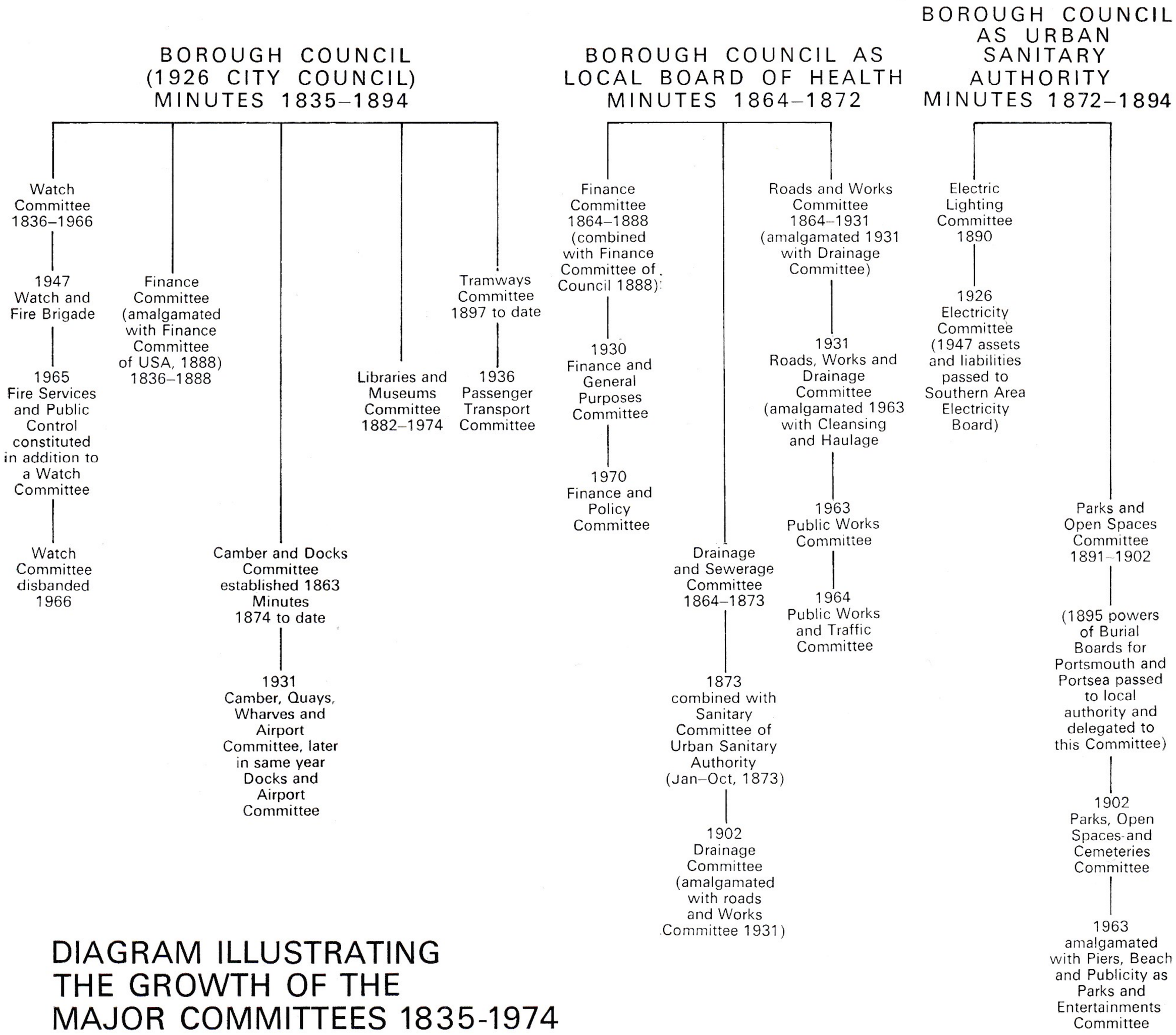
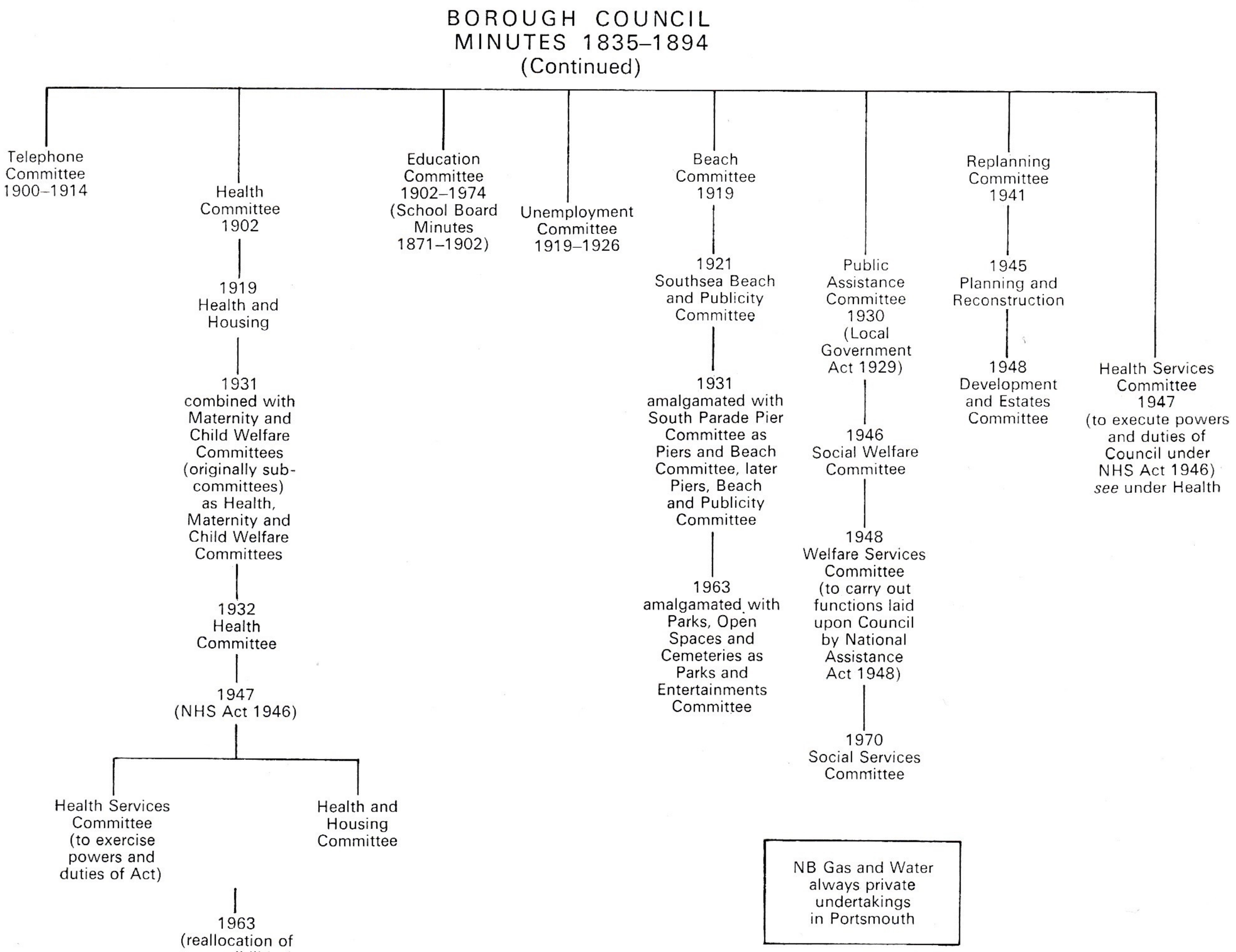


DIAGRAM ILLUSTRATING THE GROWTH OF THE MAJOR COMMITTEES 1835-1974

sary . . .' Mr. Angell's schemes were subsequently approved and form the main trunk system of today. In 1865 construction commenced. The borough was divided into a high and a low drainage area. The drainage from the higher levels of Portsea, Landport and Upper Southsea was intercepted and carried direct to the outfall at the entrance to Langstone Harbour quite independently of the low level system. The scheme was gravitational, supplemented by lifting power provided at the pumping station at Henderson Road, built in 1868, the site of the present-day Eastney Pumping Station. It is beyond dispute that the major contributing factor in the reduction of the death-rate in the community over the last hundred years from 25.3 to 10.76 per thousand is the improved drainage.

By the Public Health Act of 1872 the Local Board of Health became the Urban Sanitary Authority. The new body continued to function just as it had done in the past, exercising control over drainage, sanitation, roads, the electric light undertaking after 1890 and from 1891 parks and open spaces. From 1895, though, the distinction between the work of the Council in its municipal capacity and in its capacity as the urban sanitary authority ceased to exist. All committees were henceforward appointed by and reported to the one body, the Town Council.

In the last quarter of the 19th century the Council assumed responsibility for education and libraries and turned its attention to the question of facilities for summer visitors. On 5th December 1870 it unanimously adopted the Elementary Education Act of that year upon proof that there were 8,000 children in the borough needing school accommodation. Portsmouth was one of the first areas in Hampshire to set up a School Board and the first election for places on the Portsmouth Board took place on 13th January 1871. The major problem in the early years of the Board's history was that of accommodation. The Board increased its problems in this respect by making attendance compulsory from 5 to 13 in its first bye-laws. Almost immediately they rented 7

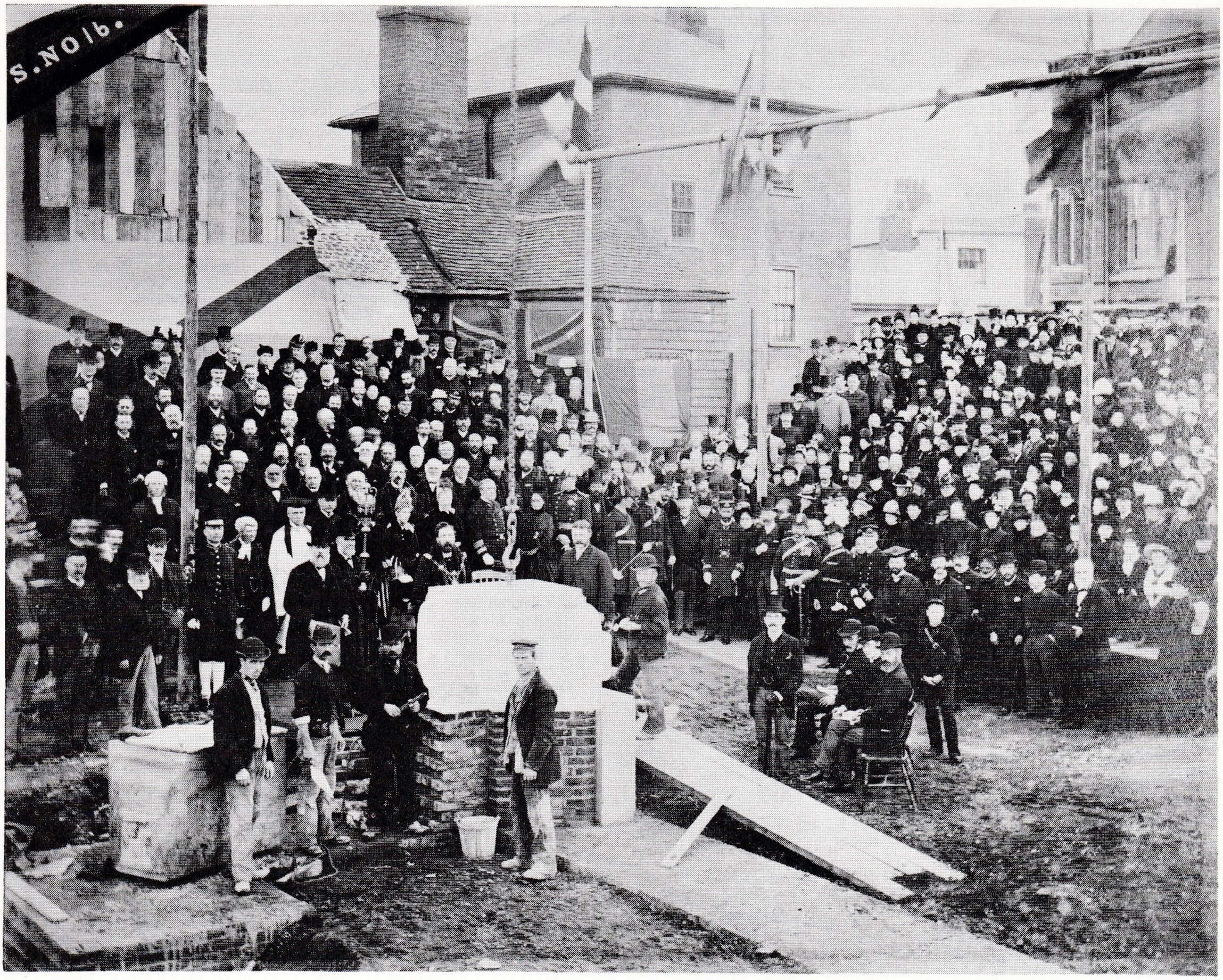


buildings for accommodation and the immediate building plans were for 12 schools each containing 600 pupils but even these plans were not really adequate and in fact the Board was always struggling to maintain an adequate supply of school places.

The great period of exertion in the 1870s when 11 elementary schools were built – New Road, Cottage Grove, Swan Street, Flying Bull Lane, Eastney Road, Fratton Street, Kent Street, Church Street, Conway Street, Albert Road and Portsmouth Town – was followed by a slack period in the next decade due in part to the growing dissatisfaction of ratepayers over the greatly increasing expenditure on education. In fact the Education Department had to exert continual pressure after 1888, culminating in a threat to stop Government grants altogether on the grounds of inefficiency, in order to spur the School Board into further activity. However, by the end of its existence the Board was providing accommodation for 26,914 pupils, while the 10 surviving voluntary schools contained 4,939 pupils.

The Board became involved in higher education. In 1888 after pressure from the Dockyard and Ship Constructive Association and the Chamber of Commerce who felt the need for a greater supply of boys with some scientific and technical education, particularly in the Dockyard, a higher grade school was established over the premises of Messrs. Pink & Son at the northern end of Commercial Road. The school had a fraught early history – there was strong opposition from private schools and the revivified Grammar School who feared competition, from the voluntary and Board schools who resented losing their best pupils and not least from members of the Board itself who felt they were exceeding their duties. In fact in 1899 such schools were declared illegal and it was the confusion of authorities in the field of secondary education that was one of the reasons for the establishment of local authorities with general educational powers in 1902.

In 1882 a Libraries and Museum Committee was appointed and in 1883 the first free public library



The laying of the foundation stone of the new Town Hall in Landport by Alderman Blake, 14th October 1886.
Portsmouth R.O.

service opened in a house – formerly the residence of the Colonel Commandant of the Royal Artillery – on a site now occupied by the present Guildhall. The whole question of a public library had been canvassed as long ago as 1853 when the Council resolved to establish a free public library and a museum. In 1860 the library and museum of the defunct Portsmouth and Portsea Literary and Philosophical Society were offered to the town on condition that the Public Libraries Act was adopted but the Town Council 'declined to bear the burden'. In 1869 and again in 1875 the Council actually adopted the Act but a public meeting of ratepayers rejected the proposal. However the decision was taken in 1882 to establish a free library and the first branch libraries – above the police stations at Southsea and Kingston – were opened in 1893 and 1897 respectively.

The first step towards the development of Southsea front was taken in May 1844 when a Committee was appointed by the Town Council to consider and report upon the best means of making a carriage road and walk on the high part of Southsea beach between the Castle and the King's Rooms which stood alongside the present Clarence Pier. In 1847 the Council resolved to apply to the Master-General of the Ordnance for permission to form the carriage-way and esplanade. Permission was forthcoming and in fact the War Department gave the land free of charge. A subscription was started, the Treasury itself contributing £300, and in 1848 Clarence Esplanade was commenced. Through the offices of the Lieutenant-Governor, Lord Frederick Fitzclarence, convict labour was used in the Esplanade's construction and many thousands of tons of mud and shingle were brought from the Dockyard steam basin which was under construction at that time. The first section of the Esplanade was actually completed by August 1848.

Matters rested here for several decades. The first Clarence Pier was opened in 1861 but this was a private development. However in the 1870s the

Council began to give serious thought to the provision of additional facilities on the Common for summer visitors. They had no real lien on the land, which was War Department property, and they were therefore considerably hampered. In 1884 though a lease was obtained and it finally became possible to develop Southsea as a resort. The Ladies' Mile was laid out at this period. So too were the trees between Pier Road and Western Parade and the ornamental garden in front of South Parade. In 1884 Craneswater was acquired, 'a rubbish-filled depression' in front of Craneswater Park. In 1886 it opened as the Canoe Lake, constructed by T. P. Hall to the designs of the Borough Engineer, H. P. Boulnois, at a cost of £3,000. In this same year the Common was extended westwards when Pembroke Gardens on the former King's Bastion were leased from the War Office. Finally in 1891 a Parks and Open Spaces Committee was appointed which would be responsible for these newly developed areas.

In 1888 Portsmouth acquired county borough status and in the next few decades her boundaries underwent considerable expansion. She was one of the 61 towns which were created county boroughs under the Local Government Act, 1888. As such the Council was the responsible local authority, providing its own local services henceforward and acting independently of the County Council. In 1895 the first extension of the borough boundary since 1832 took place to include the Great Salterns. In 1904 the boundaries were further extended to include the whole of Portsea Island and in 1920 the districts of Cosham and Paulsgrove were absorbed within the borough boundary.

A notable feature of the 1880s was the enormous growth of civic pride and local patriotism. This pride was reflected in the new town hall constructed in Landport. The town hall in the High Street opened in 1838 had been sufficient for local needs for a number of years, but with the growth of the town and the shift in the centre of the population away from the old walled towns to Landport, not to mention the transference to the Corporation of duties hitherto performed by independent bodies, the question of a new town hall came to the fore. A decision to build was reached in 1879. The land was purchased from the War Department for £10,000 in 1883 and on 14th August 1886 the foundation stone was laid by the Mayor, Alderman A. S. Blake. Almost four years later, on 9th August 1890, the opening ceremony was performed by Their Royal Highnesses the Prince and Princess of Wales. The building cost £137,098.

The following years saw the slow but steady growth of the town, raised by letters patent of George V to the dignity of a city in 1926, into a comprehensive, general purpose authority. In 1894 the work of the Urban Sanitary Authority was merged with that of the Borough Council. In 1888 the finance committees of the two bodies had been merged to form one Finance Committee and now the Drainage and Sanitary Committee and the Roads and Works Committee of the Urban Sanitary Authority became committees of the Council with the Electric Lighting Committee and the Parks and Open Spaces Committee.

In 1902 the Borough became the education authority. As a result of the Education Act of 1902 the School Board ceased to exist and its functions were transferred to the Local Authority. The Education Committee was appointed on 2nd June 1903. In Portsmouth the prospect of rate aid for voluntary schools produced fervent agitation amongst local Nonconformists. On 27th February 1904, 84 citizens including several Nonconformist ministers and one magistrate were summoned at the police court for refusing to pay a portion of the local rates demanded on the grounds that 'the Education Act violated the constitutional liberties of the people by compelling citizens to send their children to be taught doctrines which were unscriptured'. Some distress warrants were served but after a few such incidents the local agitation died down. Immediate proposals included the building of two new elementary schools – one at Eastney and one at Copnor, a new secondary school for girls and the conversion of the higher grade school for boys into a secondary school. In 1904 the Girls' Secondary School in Fawcett Road, Southsea, opened and the adjacent Higher Grade School for boys opened too. Two other major developments in these early years were the decision of the Council in 1907 to start a Day Training College for women teachers and the opening of the Municipal College (now the School of Pharmacy of the Polytechnic), erected at a cost of £120,000 on 8th September 1908.

The local authority assumed responsibility during the early years of the 20th century for a number of different aspects of public health and later housing. By a resolution of the Council on 25th March 1902 the Health Committee was established (1919, the Health and Housing Committee; 1931, Health, Maternity and Child Welfare Committee; 1932, Health Committee). Many of the major health measures were adopted on the recommendation of the formidable Dr. Mearns Fraser who finally retired in 1933 after 40 years as Medical Officer of Health. He

Part of Portsea south of Queen Street showing the infamous White's Row and King's Bench Alley, two of the most insanitary areas of the town. O. S. 1:500. Surveyed 1863.
Portsmouth R.O.

was only the fourth Medical Officer of Health in the history of the borough, the first, George (later Sir George) Turner, being appointed in 1872 by virtue of the Public Health Act of that year. The principal measures adopted during Dr. Mearns Fraser's term of office were the purification of the city's water supply by filtration in 1906; the end to uncontrolled tipping of refuse and the erection of refuse destructors, 1902–3, and the establishment of a maternity hospital in 1920. He first recommended action in this last field in 1906 but it was not until 1920 that a building was finally purchased.

In 1905 Dr. Mearns Fraser reported upon school hygiene and subsequently in 1908 a school medical officer was appointed and in 1912 a school clinic was opened in Victoria Road. In 1907 he initiated efforts to secure the better protection of the meat supply of the town. He delivered a forcible report to the Health Committee citing a number of instances of diseased animals sold in neighbouring country markets. The report attracted a good deal of attention and questions based on Dr. Mearns Fraser's findings were asked in Parliament. As a result the Local Government Board issued a circular to all local authorities advising the adoption by all large towns of the practice which Portsmouth Health Committee had subsequently adopted of sending an inspector to watch the neighbouring country markets.

In 1911 upon Dr. Fraser's recommendation a tuberculosis dispensary was opened in Portsmouth – the first of its kind to be provided in the provinces.

Slum clearance was a notable feature of the period. During Dr. Fraser's period of office nearly 1,000 dwelling houses were demolished as unfit for human habitation. The Council's first attempt at slum clearance in 1896 effected great improvements with the demolition of many of the old houses in Smith's Lane and Rosemary Lane, the making of Victory Road and the erection of a few workmen's dwellings.

However the venture proved rather costly and further efforts in this direction were postponed. In 1910, though, the first big slum clearance scheme was initiated with the clearing of the insanitary region made up of Albion Street, Southampton Row, White's Row and King's Bench Alley – some of the worst plague-spots in the town. In their place was erected Curzon-Howe Road – a model tree-lined street of artisans' dwellings. The next big scheme was in 1927 when a report submitted to the Council for

the demolition of 500 houses and the rehousing of the tenants at North End and on the Eastern Road was adopted and carried out.

The first general housing act was passed in 1919 – when the Health Committee became the Health and Housing Committee – empowering local authorities to build as many houses as necessary to meet the housing shortage. Total liability, however, was limited to the product of a penny rate. It was the 1930 Slum Clearance Act that first enabled the local authority to tackle the problem seriously and from that date a systematic approach to the problem began.

The separate structure for the local administration of poor relief came to an end in 1930. The national system of old age pensions introduced in 1908 and the measures dealing with unemployment and insurance against sickness in 1911 removed from the sphere of the Poor Law many who had previously required relief and the boards of guardians established in the 1830s continued to exercise responsibility for remaining aspects of the Poor Law. However on 1st April 1930 the powers of the boards of guardians were transferred to the county councils and county boroughs under the Local Government Act of 1929. They administered their Poor Law functions henceforward through public assistance committees. The Public Assistance Committee in Portsmouth was composed of the Mayor *ex officio*, 20 members of the Council and 8 co-opted members including no less than three women. Those duties still remaining to the new committee included arranging for the proper care and maintenance of all persons requiring relief in a poor law institution, arranging for the visiting, inspection and management of institutions, the setting to work of able–bodied men receiving outdoor relief, arranging relief of the casual poor, and caring for children formerly dealt with by the Guardians.

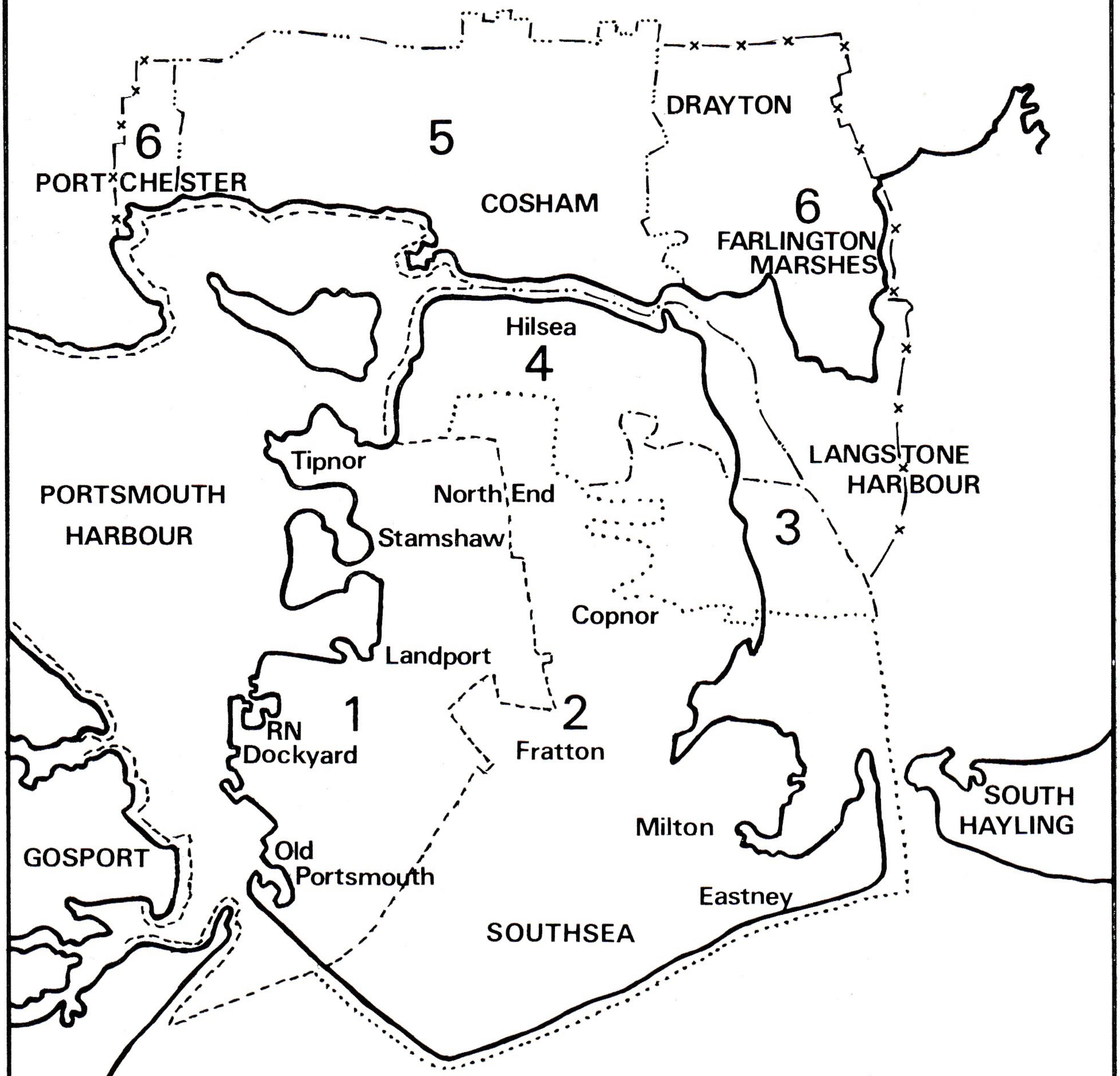
The Corporation continued to develop the town's potential as a tourist resort in the early years of the century. In 1905 the Southsea and Portsmouth Entertainment Committee was formed, outside the Council although consisting mainly of members of it, and they personally undertook provision of the necessary chairs, bandstands, etc., to add to Southsea's attractions. However by the end of the Great War it was clear that there was considerable revenue to be earned by exploiting the resort and in 1919 the Beach Committee of the Council was constituted. Under the Corporation Act of 1920 the Corporation took over the stock, assets and liabilities of the Southsea and Portsmouth Entertainment Committee and a new committee was established, the Southsea Beach and Publicity Committee, which in 1931 amalgamated with the South Parade Pier Committee to become eventually the Piers, Beach and Publicity Committee. In 1934 the Committee's enthusiasm for its job produced a local furore. A placard was published showing 'Mrs. Grundy' with her bag of troubles making a rapid departure from the City which was now declared to be free from all restrictions. A sizeable section of the community led by a Southsea vicar took considerable exception to the advertisement on the grounds that it was an invitation to 'all manner of improprieties and unbridled licence'! However the Council and the vast majority of the local inhabitants were not unduly offended and the placard was subsequently produced nationwide.

The Corporation entered the field of public transport in 1901. In 1896 a Special Committee investigated the question of the purchase of the tramway undertaking from the Provincial Tramways Co. Ltd. which was the holding Company, and the Portsmouth Street Tramways Co. owned and controlled by the Provincial Company, being an amalgamation of the former Landport and Southsea Tramways Company, the Portsmouth Street Tramways Company, the General Tramways Company of Portsmouth, Ltd., and the Gosport Street Tramways Company.

In 1897 the decision was made to acquire the Provincial Tramways Company and convert it to electric traction. By the Portsmouth Corporation Tramway Act of 1898 the Corporation was authorised under powers of purchase conferred upon them by the Tramway Act of 1870 to acquire the Provincial Company's interests in the town. A price was fixed by arbitration and on 1st January 1901 Portsmouth Corporation Tramways came into existence. Electrification of the system began at once and the first electric cars ran on 24th September. In 1919 the bus fleet was inaugurated and in 1933 the decision was taken to experiment with trolley-buses as replacements for the trams: the actual changeover beginning in 1934. In July 1936 the designations 'Tramways Undertaking' and 'Tramways Committee' were changed to 'Passenger Transport Undertaking' and 'Passenger Transport Committee' since the first was now something of a misnomer.

A rather less well-known side of the Corporation's activities was the Municipal Telephone Exchange. In 1885 the National Telephone Company agreed to provide an exchange for Portsmouth. The exchange was established over the premises of Messrs. W. Pink and Son in Commercial Road. However by 1900 the Postmaster-General had become somewhat perturbed

MUNICIPAL BOUNDARIES OF PORTSMOUTH SINCE 1832



by the monopoly of the National Telephone Company and Portsmouth was one of the few corporations which responded to the Postmaster-General's appeal to start municipal exchanges. In October 1900 the Corporation was granted a twenty-five years' licence for a municipal telephone exchange and the Telephone Committee was constituted. The venture was not unsuccessful. Subscribers numbered 2,528 by 1913 and the cost of the service was much less than that of the National Telephone Company. However in that year municipal telephones were taken over by the Post Office and it proved quite impossible for the Corporation to hold out against the pressure that was brought to bear upon them to sell up.

The Council played an active role in attempting to relieve distress in the years immediately following the end of the 1914–1918 War. In 1919 an Unemployment Committee was established and with the main aim of providing work for the unemployed the Esplanade was extended past the Marine Barracks at Eastney in 1921 with the help of substantial government grants. At the September meeting of the Town Council £25,000 was voted for the relief of the unemployed during the coming winter. The schemes of work to be undertaken were the development of Great Salterns, the construction of a new road from Portsbridge to Southwick Road running to the west of High Street, Cosham, and the construction of a new road from Portsbridge across the marshes to the west of Wymering. The total number of unemployed in the town was nearly 7,000 and the rates – to the horror of the local population – had risen to 15s 8d in the £. In October 1922 the Western Road to Paulsgrove, the first by-pass road out of the town, was opened by the Mayor. Distress in the town was easing however by this time and the rates had actually fallen to 11s 4d in the £ by 1923. In 1926 it was not even felt that it was necessary to reappoint the Unemployment Committee. The City Treasurer was able to announce, however, that since the Great War £461,238 had been spent upon works primarily undertaken for the relief of the unemployed, the Government contribution being £146,133.

In 1930 the Corporation resolved to set about acquiring a site for an aerodrome and negotiations were put in hand for the acquisition of the Highgrove Farm Estate and land belonging to the War Department. Work began on the site in November and proceeded rapidly, much of the clearing and levelling being done by those who had hitherto been unemployed. On 2nd July the Municipal Airport was opened with considerable acclamation, the original cost being £130,000.

The burnt-out shell of the Guildhall after the raid of 10th January 1941.
Portsmouth R.O.

The prestige of the town was probably at its height in the 1920s and 1930s. In 1926 the borough was raised to the dignity of a city[5] and in 1927 the diocese of Portsmouth was created out of the ancient diocese of Winchester, the parish church of St. Thomas, Portsmouth becoming the cathedral church of the new diocese. In 1928 the title of Lord Mayor was conferred on the chief magistrate of the city by letters patent. The years 1939–1945 were a dark period in the city's life. Considerable sections of old Portsmouth, Landport and Southsea were devastated by enemy action. The splendid Guildhall itself was destroyed on the night of 10th January 1941. Only the outer walls were left standing.[6]

As early as January 1937 a Special Committee was appointed by the City Council composed of the chairman and vice-chairman of the Finance and General Purposes, the Health and Watch Committees to deal with reports prepared on air-raid precautions. A War Emergency Committee was constituted in May 1939. The first recorded minutes of the committee were those of a meeting held 22nd May 1940. The modern Development and Estates Committee was constituted in the bleak early months of 1941 as the

Replanning Committee, later Planning and Reconstruction, and in 1948 Development and Estates. It was in 1943 and 1944, in the first few years of the Development and Estates Committee's history, that negotiations were begun and were brought to a conclusion on the purchase of Leigh Park, the projected new satellite town for the many people displaced from their homes by German bombing.

In 1948 the Council suffered a certain diminution of power when the whole structure of poor law administration was reformed by the National Assistance Act and most of the functions formerly exercised by the Public Assistance Committee were now administered by the central government through national assistance boards and hospital boards. Only a few functions remained with the City Council, the local authority, and they became the responsibility of the newly-designated Welfare Services Committee.[7]

The 1950s were on the whole a period of consolidation and rebuilding following the traumas of the war years. The first steps were taken towards reconstructing the devastated Guildhall in 1951 when E. Berry Webber was engaged as architect for the project. He was instructed to preserve as much as possible of the shell of the building and to reconstruct the interior to accommodate a Conference-cum-Concert Hall to seat at least 2,000 with a Small Hall and ancillary bars and foyers; a Civic Suite of Council Chamber, Mayoral Parlour, Private Dining Room and Members' Room; Committee Rooms and the Town Clerk's Department. In February 1955 the Council accepted the tender of Messrs. Geo. Walker & Slater Ltd. of London amounting to £864,531 for the reconstruction of the Guildhall and work commenced on 23rd April 1955. The first meeting of the City Council in their newly re-built premises was held on 9th September 1958 and on 8th June 1959 the Guildhall was finally re-opened by HM the Queen.

The question of the reform of local government in England and Wales was being debated by the 1960s, however. Local government in England outside London was now divided between five classes of authority – county boroughs, county councils, non-county boroughs, urban districts and rural districts. All had different functions. There was no common factor with regard to population or size in any of the different categories. It was generally agreed that this pattern indicated an urgent need for reorganisation. To provide a solution the Royal Commission on Local Government in England was set up in 1966. Its aim was to produce throughout the country a simple form of local government organised on the same principles so that in all parts of the country there was the same nomenclature and the same distribution of functions. In 1969 the Commission reported in favour of a 'unitary system' of local government.

It recommended that England outside London be divided into 61 new local government areas grouped in 8 provinces. In 58 of these local government areas single authorities – unitary authorities – would be responsible for all services as were county boroughs at that time. In the three very large metropolitan areas around Birmingham, Liverpool and Manchester responsibility for the services was to be two-tier – a metropolitan authority and a number of metropolitan district authorities. These 61 new local government areas should be grouped, with Greater London, in 8 provinces each with its own provincial council elected by the authorities for the unitary and metropolitan areas with a certain number of co-opted members. Their key function would be provincial strategy and planning framework. Finally, within the 58 unitary areas and wherever they were wanted in the metropolitan areas local councils should be elected to present and communicate the wishes of the local people – although these councils should have few, if any, operational powers.

Considerable criticism was levelled at these recommendations, not least being the somewhat undemocratic nature of the proposals for the provincial councils. The recommended local councils were to have no operational powers and far from producing a unitary system the Commission had produced a three-tier and in the Metropolitan areas a four-tier system of government in place of the single tiers in county boroughs and the two tiers in the counties.

The White Paper embodying the Commission's proposals was published in February 1970. The Government accepted the general principles but recommended two additional metropolitan areas – one in West Yorkshire and one in South Hampshire. The proposed South Hampshire metropolitan area would embrace Southampton and South Hampshire and Portsmouth, South-East Hampshire and the Isle of Wight. However before these recommendations could be implemented the Labour Government of the day fell from power in the general election of June 1970 and the Conservatives were returned to office. Whilst admitting the necessity of reform they produced their own proposals described in the White Paper, 'Local Government in England: Government Proposals for Reorganisation' (Command Paper 4584), and in the Consultative Document, 'The Reform of Local Government in Wales', and their

recommendations were embodied in the Local Government Reform Act, 1972. Quite simply England and Wales were divided into local government areas known as counties and districts, six of the counties to be metropolitan counties containing metropolitan districts (Greater Manchester, Merseyside, South Yorkshire, Tyneside, West Midlands and West Yorkshire). Portsmouth fought during the committee stages of the bill for metropolitan status for South Hampshire but to no avail. The new county and district councils were to assume full responsibilities on 1st April 1974.

Thus there has taken place the greatest change in local government this century. As elsewhere in England and Wales, Portsmouth County Borough was abolished and replaced by a district council – and in consequence has suffered a not inconsiderable diminution of power. Control of local government services is now shared between the County Council and the District Council, the City now returning 15 County Councillors to Winchester to represent its views. The City Council is still responsible for housing, environmental health, the leisure services, museums and arts, passenger transport and docks undertakings. The City Council also has responsibility for local planning and redevelopment and as an agent of the County Council the city will continue to operate the following services: highways, libraries, refuse disposal and traffic management.

However the County Council is now responsible for several major services that were formerly the responsibility of the city: consumer protection, education, fire, and the social services.

There were other major changes at the same time involving health and water services. With the unification of the National Health Service and the establishment of the Hampshire Area Health Authority some 458 of the old Local Health Authority staff were transferred to the new National Health Service – doctors, paramedical staff, nurses, dentists and the administrators, clerks and technical and manual workers who provided support for the many health services and premises formerly operated by the City Council. Finally from 1st April the responsibility for the water supply and main drainage and sewage disposal was transferred to the new Southern Water Authority.[8]

From the previous survey of the growth of the city's responsibilities it should be apparent that the wheel has gone full circle. The divided administration of mid-19th-century Portsmouth grew slowly and at times painfully into a comprehensive multi-purpose authority. The reorganisation of local government in 1974 has produced a multiplicity of authorities once more. The next hundred years should prove whether or not such a 'root and branch' reform has been justified.

REFERENCE NOTES

[1] The Royal Commission of Inquiry into the state of the municipal corporations was set up in 1833 by the first reformed parliament.

[2] The Portsea Commissioners met at the 'Ship and Castle' public house on the Hard, Portsea, from 1769 to 1843. This is the only meeting-place of the 18th- and 19th-century commissioners or councillors still surviving in Portsmouth.

[3] The Sessions Room was in St. Thomas's Street.

[4] An Act for repealing so much of several Acts as imposes the Necessity of receiving the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper as a Qualification for certain Offices and Employments 1828.

[5] The Town Hall was known subsequently as the Guildhall by resolution of the Council, 27th May 1926.

[6] The Muniment Room at the foot of the tower miraculously survived the intense heat and its contents – the city archives and plate – suffered remarkably little damage.

[7] 1970 renamed Social Services Committee.

[8] The Portsmouth Water Company, always an independent Company, remains in existence although working in conjunction with the new Water Authority.

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